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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

This document contains of 5 pages
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DATE: February 27, 1959

SUBJECT: The Berlin Situation.

PARTICIPANTS:

EUR - Mr. Foy D. Kohler, Deputy Asst Secretary of State
Mr. R. M. Booker, Counselor, Embassy of Australia
Mr. H. M. Loveday, Counselor, Embassy of Australia
GER - Mr. J. H. McFarland

MAR 4 1959

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Mr. Booker opened the discussion by asking Mr. Kohler for a review of recent developments affecting Berlin and Germany and specifically asked him to comment on Khrushchev's recent speech during MacMillan's Moscow visit.

Mr. Kohler replied that Khrushchev's conduct reminded him of Hitler. Things did not appear to have changed much except to confirm our previous speculation that the Soviets meant to push this matter to the brink. Khrushchev's speech appeared to be timed deliberately to insult Macmillan.

Mr. Booker asked what possible reason there could be for this.

Mr. Kohler said possibly the Russians had mistaken Macmillan's politeness for softness. They frequently miscalculated the temper of democracies. It may turn out that this development will have very useful results from the western point of view. He hoped especially that it would open the eyes of the editors of certain British publications.

Mr. Booker agreed that there was a good chance of Khrushchev's actions strengthening western resolution and unity but pointed out that there was some danger of it strengthening Macmillan's enemies.

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Mr. Kohler

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Mr. Kohler replied that in Macmillan's place he would have left Moscow on the first plane. He presumed the Prime Minister had stayed in order to prove that he had done everything possible to reach agreement.

Press comment had been almost unanimous in pointing out how phony the Soviets non-aggression pact offer was.

Mr. Booker asked what we could now expect in the way of developments since apparently there was to be no Foreign Ministers Meeting and we wouldn't agree to a Summit meeting.

Mr. Kohler noted that he believed he could easily write the Soviet reply to our note right now. The only likely development in the near future was the strong possibility that the Soviets turn over East Berlin to the East Germans earlier than May 27.

Mr. Booker asked if we expected, simultaneous with the turnover, a separate peace treaty between the Soviets and East Germany.

Mr. Kohler replied that intelligence estimates looked for a Soviet-East German conference to accept the ready made peace treaty any time after May 27, with June 21 listed by some sources as the specific date.

Mr. Booker commented that we would then presumably be obliged to deal with the East Germans.

Mr. Kohler said that at least we would then find East Germans along our route to Berlin.

Mr. Booker asked if Mr. Kohler thought we would not be denied access immediately. Had Khrushchev not gone so far that he had to rise to any challenge immediately? If Three Powers violated East German sovereignty they would meet with Soviet and East German resistance.

Mr. Kohler replied that it was not inconceivable that readily identifiable military vehicles would be allowed to pass. The East Germans were not necessarily bound to a specific course of action.

Mr. Booker commented that it was then necessary to wait to see whether the East German regime permits Allied passage. Assuming they will not permit passage without an East German stamp on Allied documents, was it still the US position that there was nothing to be gained by resorting to an airlift?

Mr. Kohler replied affirmatively. This did not mean that we will retire from the air but it does mean we will not give up on the ground by resorting to an airlift.

Mr. Booker asked how in practice we expected to maintain surface routes.

Mr. Kohler stated that the maintenance of trains was hopeless, we didn't use the canals, so the test would come on the autobahn. There was no point and legally no ground in trying to designate the East Germans as Soviet agents since the Soviets have denied this relationship. This would be particularly the case in a post-treaty situation.

Mr. Booker noted that the Soviets had already rejected any compromise on that point. He returned to the discussion of the situation on the autobahn and asked whether, when our vehicles were stopped, they would be under orders to push on.

Mr. Kohler said that was the case. It was important psychologically to establish clearly that the other side were the aggressors. The presence of superior force was just as much aggression as if triggers were actually pulled. Blowing up a bridge would be clear evidence of aggressions since it would interrupt civilian as well as military traffic. It remains to be seen what preliminary moves the Soviets and East Germans make before May 27. He was hopeful that the Allies would have an agreed position well before May 27 which would enable us to counter any significant moves of the other side.

Mr. Booker asked where the UN came into the picture.

Mr. Kohler declared that we had certain obligations to the UN but cannot refer such a matter to the UN without wrecking it. It would be the end of the UN if the major powers offloaded a major dispute among themselves on that organization.

Mr. Booker agreed but observed that presumably the smaller powers would want to get the General Assembly together to stop the major powers from actual conflict.

Mr. Kohler said ^{we might then simply} ~~we would then simply~~ have to report to the UN that we had done everything we could and had arrived at Article 51. The UN would not be able to cope with such a situation.

Mr. Booker asked whether, as far as the other Allies and the general western position was concerned, Mr. Kohler saw any possibility which would provide a new approach to problems raised by Moscow.

Mr. Kohler's reply was an unequivocal no.

Mr. Booker referred to Walter Lippman's suggestions for greater participation of the Germans in any proposed negotiations.

Mr. Kohler declared that it was already provided in the last paragraph of our note of February 16 that the Germans should be invited.

Mr. Booker pointed out that this suggestion stopped short of their direct participation in negotiations. He wondered if there had been any discussion or suggestions made that these two groups could go off in a corner and discuss reunification.

Mr. Kohler replied that both groups would be sitting in the same room. Although it was not our official position to permit or recommend this, he was able to contemplate the idea without too much difficulty.

Mr. Booker asked if we didn't think something useful would be accomplished by making such an offer specifically.

Mr. Kohler said such an offer from our side would not be useful as long as the Soviets were not prepared to accept essential elements of the whole complex short of direct West-East German negotiation.

Mr. Booker asked for Mr. Kohler's estimate of the point at which the Communists might be satisfied to take their winnings. Would Khrushchev press ahead to the point where he sees himself taking all Germany or is their some lesser goal he seeks?

Mr. Kohler remarked that this question was particularly hard to answer. It was still our estimate that the Soviets don't want war but we have gone about as far as we can go to give them a way out. They will have to make a way out for themselves now. Any further concessions on our part would lead to a repetition along the pattern of Munich. Soviet arrogance and conceit would merely be strengthened by our yielding.

Mr. Loveday noted that Khrushchev must be calculating that his tactics would be successful in splitting the western alliance.

Mr. Booker asked if Mr. Kohler was certain that Khrushchev was wrong in his estimate.

Mr. Kohler said he thought he could be certain of this fact. He believed Khrushchev would overplay his hand. As the crisis approaches we will have closer cooperation and unity than now and the situation is not bad now. The chief job now is mobilizing public opinion.

Mr. Booker noted the impression of public disorder and confusion over the western position as given in the western press.

Mr. Kohler thought this impression would be largely dissipated by the press itself. The situation was a lot like that which existed in 1948 as we felt our way to a unified position on the Berlin question.

Mr. Booker replied that the situation was different today. The challenge was evaded in 1948. It is impossible to evade the challenge this time and weren't the United States and its allies still divided on the airlift question?

Mr. Kohler stated that there was no problem anymore on this question.

Mr. Loveday asked if the Working Group was still planning to meet, and whether there was any firm information on Macmillan's plans to come to Washington.

Mr. Kohler informed him that the working group was planning to meet in Paris on or about March 9 and that there was as yet nothing official about a visit by Macmillan. He had said he might come and we would certainly be glad to see him. We were most anxious to get all his reports.

Mr. Booker, in taking leave, expressed both his personal and official regrets over the Secretary's illness.

Mr. Kohler spoke reassuringly of the likelihood of the Secretary's early return to his desk.